

***Joined By Rep. Mike Quigley, Rep. Jared Polis, and LGBT and Immigrant Community Leaders in Chicago, Gutierrez Outlines Unified Plan to Pass Immigration Reform with UAFA Provisions***

*Congressman Gutierrez: "The Uniting American Families Act is important and I will fight for UAFA and its inclusion in any comprehensive immigration reform bill."*

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Media Contact: Douglas Rivlin (202) 225-8203

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**(Washington, DC)** – *Congressman Luis V. Gutierrez (D-IL), today joined Rep. Mike Quigley (D-IL) and Rep. Jared Polis (D-CO) to announce his unwavering support for allowing legal family-based immigration for same-sex couples as part of any comprehensive immigration reform plan that moves forward in Congress. The leader in Congress of efforts to pass comprehensive immigration that reunites families and restores fairness and the rule of law to the system, Gutierrez is the lead sponsor of the Comprehensive Immigration Reform for America's Security and Prosperity Act of 2009 (CIR ASAP / H.R. 4321). Gutierrez, Quigley, and Polis were joined at a noon press conference in Chicago by leaders of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered (LGBT) community in Chicago, supporters of immigration reform, and same-sex binational couples who benefit from a law known as the Uniting American Families Act (UAFA / H.R. 1024).*

*The following are excerpts from Congressman Gutierrez' opening statement:*

Today, I am joined by my good friends and colleagues Mike Quigley and Jared Polis to make it clear that comprehensive immigration reform must be truly comprehensive and by that I mean that the provisions of the Uniting American Families Act – or UAFA – that would help same-sex bi-national couples secure legal immigration – must be a part of immigration reform.

I told my fellow Members of Congress and leading groups in the LGBT community in December when we introduced the Comprehensive Immigration Reform for American Security and Prosperity Act – H.R. 4321 – that I was committed to making UAFA a part of immigration reform when it moved in the House. What has changed is that we have not had the developments in the House we hoped for and the coalition supporting the CIR-ASAP bill is much stronger and broader today and the coalition supporting UAFA is in a powerful place to help us get across the finish line.

The Uniting American Families Act is important and I will fight for UAFA and its inclusion in any comprehensive immigration reform bill that passes this Congress.

We need to recognize that one of the main problems facing the U.S. when it comes to immigration is that our legal immigration system is so dysfunctional and restrictive that we have created incentives for people to go around our system rather than going through it. Nowhere is this more true than for committed same-sex couples who have to make a painful choice between their family and the immigration laws of the U.S. that do not recognize these family units for the purposes of immigration. By disallowing legal immigration and family unity for these couples and families, our immigration laws are separating families and to preventing the reunification of families separated by borders because of immigration bureaucracy and restrictions.

From the outset, I have been trying to highlight the family unification aspects of immigration reform. That little girl who whispered to Michelle Obama her fear that President Obama's government might come one day to take her mommy away is why we are fighting for immigration reform. In that brief, 20-second exchange, that Maryland second-grader made it crystal clear what is wrong with our immigration mess.

Unfortunately, her plight is all too common. As part of our Families United/Familias Unidas tour, I travelled to at least 30 cities and heard from tens of thousands of families that fear deportation or can't get a visa to bring a close family member or a child here legally. We deported almost 400,000 people last year – and let's be clear, President Obama is deporting people at a faster rate than even the George Bush administration – and what are we getting for those almost 400,000 deportations? A lot of fear, a lot of disruption, huge costs to our pocket-books and our values as a nation, but even at a rate of 1000 deportations a day, we are not solving our immigration problems.

We need legal ways for immigrants like the mother of that second-grader to enter the U.S. in the first place. We need to make legal immigration a realistic alternative for the people who feel the only way available to them to come and work in America is to walk across the desert of Arizona or pay a smuggler to get them here. We need a way for undocumented immigrants like the mother of that Maryland girl to come forward, pay a fine, go through a process including criminal background checks, and get legal as a condition of staying and working in this country.

And I am here to say that as far as I am concerned, it doesn't matter to me whether that little girl has one mommy or two mommies. It's none of my business; it is none of the government's business, and it should not make a difference when it comes to our immigration policies.

UAFA has a lot of support inside and outside the LGBT community, but UAFA alone can't fix what is wrong about our current immigration mess. Likewise, comprehensive immigration reform is necessary, but not sufficient to fix what is wrong with our immigration system if some same-sex couples and families are still left out.

I'm committed to working with Mike Quigley and Jared Polis, who have each demonstrated incredible leadership in the U.S. Congress.. And I'm committed to bringing the immigration reform movement together with the coalition supporting UAFA to fight for inclusion of same-sex families.

The goal must be to have an immigration system that keeps families together, enhances America's security, strengthens the economy, and is true to the core values of this nation that guarantees freedom and protects the basic human and civil rights of every individual. In order to get there, we need comprehensive immigration reform and we need UAFA and together – working as a team – we can make that goal a reality.

Thank you.

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